# THE MOST EXCELLENT MANNER OF **SEEKING FORGIVINESS**

A Lecture delivered by
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All praise is due to Allaah. We praise Him, we seek His aid, we ask for His forgiveness and we repent to Him. We seek Allaah's refuge from the evils of ourselves and the evil consequences of our actions. Whomsoever Allaah guides, then none can misguide him and whomsoever Allaah misguides, then none can guide him. I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allaah, Alone, having no partner, and I testify that Muhammad is His Slave and His Messenger. May Allaah extol and send blessings of peace upon him, upon his true followers and upon all of his Companions. To proceed:

My noble brothers, this lecture, upon the topic of seeking al-Istigfaar - asking for forgiveness for ones sins - deals with one of the most important topics to which the Muslim should give attention in his life and for which he should have the utmost concern. Included in it is the explanation of a tremendous way of seeking forgiveness, from amongst the various forms of seeking forgiveness that occur in the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. We ask Allaah that it should be beneficial to us and a blessing for us.

There are many texts to be found in the Book of Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, and in the sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ that encourage one to seek forgiveness: texts commanding it, showing its excellence, showing the excellence of its people and of those who are constant in it. In fact, there are so many of these texts that it would be very difficult to enumerate them. From them is the saying of Allaah, the Perfect and Most High:

قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا۟ مِن
رَّحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ

**"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed greatly against themselves through sins! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allaah. Indeed Allaah forgives all sins to those who repent. Indeed He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.**" Soorah az-Zumar (39):54

Some of the Salaf have said that this aayah from the Book of Allaah, is the one that gives the most hope to the one who seeks forgiveness. Moreover, Allaah, the Most High, in encouragement of seeking forgiveness, and in making clear its excellence and its fruits both in this worldly life and in the Hereafter, refer to what Nooh عليه السلام said:

فَقُلْتُ ٱسْتَغْفِرُوا۟ رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ غَفَّارًا
يُرْسِلِ ٱلسَّمَآءَ عَلَيْكُم مِّدْرَارًا ﴿١١﴾ وَيُمْدِدْكُم بِأَمْوَٰلٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَل
لَّكُمْ جَنَّٰتٍ وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ أَنْهَٰرًا

**"He says: "I said to them, 'Ask forgiveness from your Lord, indeed He is Oft-Forgiving. He will send rain to you in abundance and He will give you increase in wealth and children, and bestow on you gardens and rivers."** Soorah Nooh (71):10-12

This tremendous aayah promises numerous benefits and offers important lessons for those who seek forgiveness and for those who constantly ask forgiveness for their sins. It is related that a man came to al-Hasan al-Basree, the noble Taabi'ee, and complained to

him of poverty. So he said to him, ‘Ask forgiveness of Allaah.' Another man came to him complaining that he did not have any children. So he said to him, ‘Ask forgiveness of Allaah.' A third man came to him complaining of the barrenness of his garden. So he said to him, ‘Ask forgiveness of Allaah.' He then recited to them the saying of Allaah, the Perfect and Most High:

فَقُلْتُ ٱسْتَغْفِرُوا۟ رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ غَفَّارًا
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**“I said to them, ‘Ask forgiveness from your Lord, indeed He is Oft-Forgiving. He will send rain to you in abundance and He will give you increase in wealth and children and bestow on you gardens and rivers.**" Soorah Nooh (71):10-12

These then are some of the fruits of seeking forgiveness and some of its benefits in the worldly life. As for the Hereafter, then the benefits of seeking forgiveness are very great and tremendous.

With regard to the Sunnah, there are many texts from the Prophet encouraging the seeking of forgiveness and making clear its excellence. From them is the hadeeth of Anas ibn Maalik رضي الله عنه that is reported by, amongst others, at-Tirmidhee in his Sunan. He said, "Allaah's Messenger ﷺ said: **‘Allaah, the Most High, said, ‘O son of Aadam! As long as you supplicate to Me, and hope in Me, I will forgive you what you have done and I do not care. O son of Aadam! If your sins were to reach the lofty regions of the sky, then you asked Me for forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Aadam! If you were to come to Me with enough sins to fill the earth, but you met Me not associating anything with Me - I would bring you the like of it of fogiveness.**"

So the proof in this hadeeth qudsee for the excellence of seeking forgiveness is in the second sentence. That is the saying of Allaah, the Most High,
‘**O son of Aadam! If your sins were to reach the lofty regions ('anaan) of the sky ...**' as for the "anaan' of the sky, then it is said, ‘It means the clouds ...,' it is also said, ‘It is the extent of the sky that is reached by ones eyesight.'
So, even if the sins were so many, so various and so monstrous, Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, would forgive the servant if he asked Him for forgiveness.

Also from the ahaadeeth reported on the subject of seeking forgiveness is that of Aboo Hurairah, reported by al-Bukhaaree' that the Prophet ﷺ said, "**By the One in whose Hand is my soul, I certainly ask forgiveness of Allaah and repent to him more than seventy times each day.**" [1] The Prophet ﷺ was such that Allaah had forgiven his earlier and later sins, yet he still used to ask Allaah's forgiveness more than a hundred times each day. Indeed, as Ibn 'Umar said, "We used to count that in a single gathering he would say, **‘I ask Allaah's forgiveness and I repent to Him,** [2] more than seventy times." Thus he ﷺ would continuously ask for forgiveness and give it great importance.

Also from the ahaadeeth showing the excellence and great importance of seeking forgiveness is that reported by Muslim in his Saheeh from Aboo Hurairah ﷺ from the Prophet ﷺ that he said, "**By Allaah! If you did not commit sins, Allaah would have taken**

[1] Eng. Transl. Vol. 8, no. 319. The wording of al-Bukhaaree is, "... more than seventy times." And the wording of a narration of at-Tirmidhee is, "I seek the forgiveness of Allaah a hundred times in the day." Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmidhee, no. 2597.
[2] See As-Saheehah, no. 556.

**you away and brought a people who seek Allaah's forgiveness, and He would forgive them.**" [3] He would have taken you away and He would have brought a people who seek Allaah's forgiveness, and He would forgive them - this shows the extent to which Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, loves the seeking of forgiveness and that He loves those who ask for His forgiveness.

Amongst the perfect Names of Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, is Al-'Afuww - ‘He who pardons,' and Al-Ghafoor - ‘He who forgives,' and Al-Ghaffaar - ‘The Oft-Forgiving.' Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, loves that we call upon Him by His names and that we worship Him by that which His names demand. As He Himself said:

وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْأَسْمَآءُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ فَٱدْعُوهُ بِهَا

**“And Allaah has the most excellent and perfect names, so worship and invoke Him by them**” Soorah al-A'raaf (7):180.

Also, the Prophet ﷺ said in a hadeeth reported in the two Saheehs' from Aboo Hurairah ﷺ, "**Allaah has ninety-nine names, a hundred except one. Whoever memorises and is mindful of them (ahsaahaa) will enter Paradise.**" [4] However, ‘... memorising and being mindful of them ...' (ihsaa), is not merely to take these names upon a piece of paper and to recite them - as some people do. In fact, the scholars have explained that ihsaa of the names comprises three levels. The first of these is to memorise the names. The second is to understand their meanings. And the third is to call upon Allaah by these names and to act as they demand.

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[3] Eng. Transl. vol. 4, no. 6522.

[4] Al-Bukhaaree, Eng. Transl. vo1. 8, no. 419 and Muslim, no. 6476.

As an example of this, we may take from the names of Allaah that of (say), At-Tawwaab. We then understand that its meaning, ‘He who guides His servants to repent and accepts their repentance,' is telling us that Allaah, the Majestic and Most High, accepts His servant's repentance, guides them to repent and grants that to them. We also understand that He, the Most High, is the only One to grant forgiveness. Having understood all this, we act as the name demands by repenting to Allaah from all our sins.

This is the manner in which we must memorise and understand all the perfect names of Allaah. However, it is important that our understanding of them should be correct and far removed from such corrupt methodologies as ta'weel, which attempts to explain away the meanings of Allaah's attributes by deviated and twisted understandings, or ta'teel, which denies both the attributes and that which they indicate - that which Allaah and His Messnger ﷺ intended. No, our understanding is based upon the methodology of the Salaf of the Ummah.
Allaah is Al-Ghafoor - ‘The One who forgives,' and He is Al-Ghaffaar - ‘The Oft-Forgiving,' and He is Al-'Afuww - ‘The One who pardons.' These, from the perfect names of Allaah, demand that we constantly seek forgiveness, that we frequently repent and that we turn in repentance to Allaah, the Most High. Yes, Allaah is indeed the Cane who forgives. As He, the Most High, said in the Noble Qur'aan:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ
ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ

**"Allaah does not forgive that anything is associated in worship with Him, but He forgives whatever is lesser than shirk to whomever He pleases."** [5]

However, in addition to deserving and seeking forgiveness, there are other conditions that must be fulfilled by the one who seeks it. From those sayings of Allaah the Most High, that most comprehensively lay down the conditions for attaining forgiveness of sins, is this aayah from Soorah Taa Haa:

وَإِنِّي لَغَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا ثُمَّ ٱهْتَدَىٰ

**"Indeed I am forgiving to the one who repents, truly believes, does righteous and correct deeds, and then remains constant upon right guidance"**[6]

So, "**Indeed I am forgiving ...**" and who is he who receives forgiveness from Allaah, the Majestic and Most High? It is the one who fulfills Allaah's conditions.

Firstly, it is he who repents. Repentance - at-Tawbah - is the only action that will cause all sins to be forgiven. It is reported, "Repentance erases what came before it." It wipes away the previous sins. Allaah forgives the sins of the repentant even if they are as many as the foam of the ocean. As Allaah has said:

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[5] Soorah an-Nisaa (4): 48

[6] Soorah Taa Haa (20):82.

قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا۟ مِن
رَّحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ

**"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed greatly against themselves through sins! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allaah. Indeed Allaah forgives all sins to those who repent. Indeed He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.**" [7]

"**Do not despair ...**" means here, 'Repent to Allaah,' because He is, indeed, the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

Secondly, the one who fulfils Allaah's conditions for repentance is he who, "**... truly believes ...,**" he truly believes in Allaah, His Angels, His Books and His Messengers. He believes in the fundamentals of Eemaan.

The third condition for the one who is seeking Allaah's forgiveness is that he, "**... does righteous and correct deeds ...,**" he does these after repenting. Devoting himself to worship, to Prayer, to remembrance of Allaah, to fearing Him and to being mindful of Him. By devoting himself to these deeds of the heart and limbs, he turns to Allaah.

Fourthly, "**... he remains constant upon right guidance ...**" He remains upright upon that, he does not break it nor turn back from it. He remains upon it until he dies. Whoever is like that, Allaah forgives his sins and conceals his faults. He is one of those who attain the forgiveness of Allaah, the Majestic and Most High.
O my brothers, I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture that it included the explanation of a tremendous way of seeking

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[7] Soorah az-Zutnar (39)54

forgiveness. It is a form of seeking forgiveness that the scholars have mentioned as being the most excellent and most complete Therefore, we should give great importance to memorising the wording, to understanding it correctly and to acting upon it.

So from Shaddaad ibn Aws ﷺ from the Prophet ﷺ that he said, "**The noblest and most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness is that the servant says:**

اللَّهُــمَّ أَنْــتَ رَبِّــي لاَ إِلَــهَ إِلاَّ أَنْــتَ
خَلَقْتَنِي وَأَنَا عَبْدُكَ ، وَأَنَا عَلَى عَهْدِكَ
وَوَعْدِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ أَعُــوْذُ بِـكَ مِـنْ
شَرِّ مَا صَنَعْــتُ ، أَبُـوءُ لَـكَ بِنِعْمَتِـكَ
عَلَيَّ ، وَأَبُوءُ بِذَنْبِي ، فَاغْفِرْ لِـي فَإِنَّـهُ
لاَيَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلاَّ أَنْتَ.

**'O Allaah, You are my Lord. None has the right to be wrshipped except You. You created me, and I am Your slave/worshipper. And I am faithful to my covenant and my promise as far as I am able. I seek Your refuge from the evil of what I have done. [8] I acknowledge before You all the favours that You have bestowed upon me. And I confess all my sins to You. So forgive me, since none can forgive sins except You.'**

[8] This wording occurs in one of the two narrations brought by Bukhaaree.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "**Whoever says it in the day, with firm conviction in it, and dies in that day before evening - then he is from the people of Paradise. Whoever says it in the night, with firm conviction in it, and he dies before the Morning - then he is from the people of Paradise.**"

The scholars count this hadeeth as one of the narrations both for the night and for the day - one of the dhikrs that should be said in early morning (sabaah), between dawn and sunrise, and at the start of the evening (masaa). Whoever says it and dies in that day, before evening, will enter Paradise. Similarly, whoever says it at night, and then dies before morning, will enter Paradise. Paradise is guaranteed for him.

This tremendous hadeeth of Shaddaad ibn Aws ؓ is reported by al-Bukhaaree in his Saheeh in the Book of Supplications, under the title: 'Chapter: The most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness.' He also quotes it in a second place in the same Book under the title: 'Chapter: What to say when one gets up in the (early) morning.' This shows that Imaam al-Bukhaaree (rahimahullah) holds that, in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, "**The most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness ...**" to the end of the hadeeth, there is proof that this is indeed the best wording for seeking forgiveness and the wording that is most complete.

When we study and reflect upon these words and what they contain with regard to all aspects of supplication: humble submission, humility, ones abject poverty and need before Allaah, acknowledgement of His favour and blessings, and the fact that none forgives sins except Him-when we consider this, then it becomes clear to us that the wording of this hadeeth is very great and that it indeed deserves its description by the Prophet ﷺ as, "The noblest/most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness."

Furthermore, this is the only hadeeth of the noble Companion, Shaddaad ibn Aws ﷺ that is reported by al-Bukhaaree in his Saheeh and it is a noteworthy fact that he reports it twice. This is a point of benefit for the science of hadeeth and, although Muslim excludes it, it is also reported by some of the compilers of the Sunan, such as an-Nasaa'ee and at-Tirmidhee with wordings that also show the importance of learning this manner of seeking forgiveness.

In a narration of at-Tirmidhee the Propeht ﷺ said: **“Shall I not guide you to the most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness?**" And, in a narration of an-Nasaa'ee he ﷺ said, "**Learn the most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness.**" This shows that learning this wording for seeking forgiveness from Allaah, the Perfect and Most High, was encouraged by the Prophet.

The hadeeth is reported with other wordings close to this form, the hadeeth of Aboo Hurairah, also Ibn 'Umar, Ibn Mas'ood, Ibn Abzaa and Buraydah (ﷺ). However, the wordings of Shaddaad ibn Aws, is that which al-Bukhaaree reports in his Saheeh, so it is befitting, O my brothers, that we give precedent to memorisation of this supplication which the Prophet described as the most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness.

Regarding the meaning of this hadeeth, some of the people of knowledge say that, because it is comprehensive, covering as it does all the meanings of repentance (tawbah), it is entitled to be considered the noblest and most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness. This is why al-Bukhaaree gave it this heading in his Saheeh: ‘The best/most excellent (Afdal) manner of seeking forgiveness.' Furthermore, the wording, in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, "Sayyidul-Istighfaar ... (literally: the Chief of Seeking Forgiveness)" confirms its being the most excellent form of words. It

follows, therefore, that this wording, "The most excellent form of seeking forgiveness…" is that which will bring the great benefit.

Prophet ﷺ at the start of the supplication, "That the Servant says ..." the word, "Allaahumma ..." means by agreement, "( Allaah!" (Yaa Allaah) and it is a word whose meaning occur frequently both in the Book of Allaah and in the Sunnah of the Prophet

Ibn al-Qayylm (rahimahullah) said: "There is no about the fact that the word, 'Allaahumma' means, 'O Allaah!' Therefore it is not used except when requesting. One does not say 'Allaahumma ghafoorun raheem,' - 'O Allaah! Forgiving, Merciful.' Rather one should say: 'O Allaah! Forgive me and have mercy upon me."

The scholars have explained that the tawheed we have been commanded to realize and perfect , to apply and complete , falls in two categories:

(i) Tawheed with regard to that which one must know and affirm.

(ii) Tawheed with regard to ones intentions and worship (Tawheedul-Iraadah wat-Talab).

The saying of the Prophet ﷺ: "**O Allaah! You are my Lord. None has the right to be worshipped except You. You created me and I am Your slave and worshipper ...**" combines both of these aspects.

The first of them, Tawheedul-Ma'rifah wal-Ithbaat (tawheed with regard to that which one must know and affirm), comprises Tawheedur-Ruboobiyyah (Tawheed of Allaah's Lordship) and Tawheedul-Asmaa was-Sifaat (Tawheed of Allaah's names and attributes). Tawheedur-Ruboobiyyah affirms that Allaah is the

Creator, the Providor, the One who grants all blessings, the One who alone is in control of all the affairs of His creation. Tawheedul-Asmaa was-Sifaat affirms His names and attributes, as mentioned in His Book and in the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ.

These aspects of tawheed relate to matters that require knowledge and affirmation. One must know that Allaah is the Creator, the Providor, the One who grants all blessings, the One in control of all affairs. One must know His names and attributes as mentioned in His Book and in the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ and one must acknowledge and affirm all this. This is illustrated by his saying, "**O Allaah! You are my Lord, You created me ...**" which affirms Allaah's Lordship and that He alone is the Creator.

The second aspect, Tawheedul-Iraadah wat-Tatab, is the Tawheed of worship and this demands that all worship is performed purely and sincerely for Allaah alone. The saying, "You created me and I am Your slave and worshipper…" is a proof for the Tawheed of worship as mentioned by the scholars. If acknowledges that there is no creator except Allaah, then it is binding upon him to worship nothing except Allaah. The meaning occurs frequently in the Qur'aan where Allaah Lordship, His creating, His granting permission, His granting life and death are given as proofs for worship being made solely for Him:

وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

**"And I am your Lord, therefore worship Me alone**' [9]

So just as their is no Lord for you besides Me, then there is none for you to worship besides Me.' Allaah, the Most High says:

[9] Soorah al-Anbiyaa (21):92

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ ٱعْبُدُوا۟ رَبَّكُمُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ
وَٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ ٱلَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ
ٱلْأَرْضَ فِرَٰشًا وَٱلسَّمَآءَ بِنَآءً وَأَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجَ
بِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ ۖ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا۟ لِلَّهِ أَندَادًا وَأَنتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ

**“O mankind! Single out your Lord with all worship – He who created you and all those who came before you, that you may be of those who seek to avoid Allaah’s punishment and anger, those whom Allaah is pleased with. He who has made the earth a resting place for you, and has made the sky a canopy, and Who sends down rain from the clouds, and who brought out with crops and fruits from the earth as provision for you. So do not set up rivals for Allaah in your worship when you know that there is no Lord besides Him”**[10]

**“...worship when you know ...**" is addressed to those who did set up such rivals. This is why Allaah addressed them in this manner. As to what these people ‘knew,' Ibn 'Abbaas ﵄ and others said, ‘So do not set up partners with Allaah in your worship when you know that you have no Creator other than Allaah,' and this defines the meaning of the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, "**You created me and I am Your slave and worshipper.**"

There is no Creator besides Allaah, therefore none has the right to be worshipped except Allaah. We do not submit and humble ourselves; we do not invoke and supplicate; we do not call for

[10] Soorah al-Baqarah (2): 21-22

deliverance except to Allaah alone-the One Who brought us into existence after we were nothing.

So, since there is no Creator besides Allaah, we do not direct any worship to anyone but Him. The use of Tawheed of Allaah's Lordship is a proof of Tawheed of worship. Therefore, a person who supplicates to other than Allaah and invokes other than Allaah is to be rebuked. He is not only rebuked for invoking those who can neither benefit nor harm him, but also for forsaking the Creator, the Provider, the One who benefits and harms, the One who grants all blessings, He Who controls all the affairs of His creation.

So, when one considers - and this is the sad situation - some of those who in these times attribute themselves to Islaam, it is apparent that although they acknowledge that there is no Creator except Allaah, although they indeed say, ‘Laa ilaahaa illallaah,' they are still to be found at shrines and tombs: the tomb of al-Badawee, the graves of Zaynab and Nafeesah and so on. They make vows and sacrifices to them. They call upon them foe deliverance. They make request for things. They debase and humble themselves. They direct all these acts worship to tombs that can neither harm nor benefit anyone:

قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُم مِّن دُونِهِۦ
فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ ٱلضُّرِّ عَنكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا

**“Say, O Muhammad, to those who worship others besides Allaah, ‘Call upon those you claim are deserving of worship besides Allaah. They do not have the power to remove any**

**harm from you at all, nor even to move it away to someone else."** [11]

قُلِ ٱدْعُوا۟ ٱلَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُم مِّن دُونِ
ٱللَّهِ ۖ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَلَا فِى
ٱلْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِن شِرْكٍ وَمَا لَهُۥ مِنْهُم مِّن ظَهِيرٍ
وَلَا تَنفَعُ ٱلشَّفَٰعَةُ عِندَهُۥٓ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُۥ ۚ

**"Say, 'Call upon those who you claim are deserving of worship besides Allaah. They do not possess or control an atoms weight of good or evil, harm or benefit in the heavens and the earth. Nor do they even possess a share in any of that. Nor is there any helper for Allaah from amongst them. Nor does any intercession benefit with Him except for him whom Allaah grants permission."** [12]

Therefore, the One to whom supplication is to be made; the One from whom deliverance is to be sought; the One who is to be relied upon and worshipped is Allaah alone, the Creator.

This is an excellent point, a tremendous and noble matter that is illustrated in this great hadeeth. Likewise, his saying, "**None has the right to be worshipped except You ...**" is acknowledgement and affirmation of Allaah's Divinity and right to be worshipped. It is a statement of the Shahaadah 'Laa ilaaha illallaah' - none has the right to be worshipped except Allaah.

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[11] Soorah al-Israa (17):56.

[12] Soorah Saba (34):22-23

Thus, this tremendous declaration, that comes at the beginning of this hadeeth, states the purpose of the whole of creation; that for which the heavens and the earth were established and for which the Paradise and the Fire were created; the reason why the people became divided into two groups, the fortunate and the wretched-the people of Paradise and the people of the Fire. Those who affirm this saying are the people of Paradise and those who reject it are the people of the Fire.

Then the scholars have clarified the fact that this saying will not be of benefit to the one who says it unless he fulfills its conditions, and these are mentioned in the Book of Allaah and in the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ. These conditions have been rendered into verse as follows:

*'And it is qualified by seven conditions That are truly reported in the texts of the Revelation. So one who says it will not be benefitted By saying it unless he fulfils them. Knowledge, certainty, acceptance And compliance-realise what I say And truthfulness, sincerity and love of it. May Allaah guide you to that which He loves."*

Here, the poet has stated seven very great conditions for, 'Laa ilaaha illallaah,' and these are supported by many proofs in the Book of Allaah and in the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ.

Next, his saying in the hadeeth, "And I am Your slave /worshipper ('abduka) ..." is an affirmation of Allaah's right to be worshipped and that the creation are Allaah's slaves ('Ibaad). The servitude ('Uboodiyyah) of the creation is of two types: servitude to His Lordship and servitude in worship of Him.

The servitude to the Lordship of Allaah means that the whole of creation have been brought into existence by Allaah alone; that He

created them; that He provides for them; that He gives them life and that He causes them to die. None shares with Him in this. For these reasons, nothing in creation can escape this servitude to Allaah's Lordship.

إِن كُلُّ مَن فِي
ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّآ ءَاتِي ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ عَبْدًا

**"All (Angels) in the heavens, and all (men and Jinn) upon the earth will come to the Most Merciful on the Day of judgement as submissive slaves.**" Soorah Maryam (19):93.

Whereas servitude in worship of Him is something that He has granted to some of His creation in particular-those who He has guided and upon whom He has bestowed eemaan; those who He has guided to obedience to the Most Merciful. So these are slaves who worship Him. They submit to Him, obey Him, comply with what He has legislated, carry out His orders and obey His Messengers - the Prophets and those follow them. Therefore Allaah, the Most High, ascribed them to Himself in the like of His saying:

وَعِبَادُ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ

"**And the slaves of the Most Merciful ...**' [13]

So these are part of Allaah's creation; those who are rightly guided - guided by Allaah; those who devote themselves to the worship of Allaah, to obedience to Him and to submission to what He, the Perfect and Most High, has legislated.

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[13] Soorah al-Furqaan (25):63

As far as I understand, what is meant in this hadeeth by the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, "I am Your slave and worshipper..." is the servitude that is the worship of Allaah, since servitude to His Lordship has already been indicated in his saying, "You created me..." and in his saying, "O Allaah! You are my Lord." So his saying, "... and I am Your slave and worshipper..." means, 'I am a worshipper of You, obedient to You, one who carries out Your commands and one who complies with what You have legislated.'

Thus, the hadeeth commences with these great and comprehensive matters, which, as has been previously stated, pertain to Tawheed. To discuss these matters fully would be very time-consuming, so what has previously been mentioned in this respect will have to suffice.

As for his saying, "And I am faithful to my covenant (to You) and my promise (to You)-as far as I am able..." the people of knowledge mention various meanings for it. Some scholars say that what it means is, 'I am faithful to the covenant I have given and the promise I have made to You, that I will have Eemaan in You and that I will be purely and sincerely obedient to You, as far as I am able.'

Thus the servant agrees and promises that he will truly believe. The servant who says, "I am Your slave and worshipper..." means, 'I will adhere to worshipping You.' He has made a covenant with Allaah and has promised that he will remain upright upon obedience to Allaah. Therefore the servant, in every Prayer -indeed in every rak'ah - makes the promise to Allaah that he will worship Him and not worship anything else besides Him; that he will call for His aid and not call for that of anyone besides Him, purely and sincerely for Allaah:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

**“You alone do we worship, and Your aid alone do we seek.”** [14]

Thus, in the hadeeth, when the servant says, "And I am faithful to my covenant and my promise to You as far as I am able ..." he means, ‘I have agreed to the covenant and promised that I will persist upon Eemaan, worship and compliance with your commands, so I remain faithful to this ...' (knowing that) Allaah does not place a burden on my soul that is greater than it can bear.

Other scholars say it is possible that the meaning is, ‘I am faithful to the covenant that You made binding upon me. To whatever commands You have enjoined upon me and I will keep to that so far as I am able.' So Allaah made a binding covenant ('ahida) upon us that we should remain upon Eemaan. He commanded us with that and He called us to it. So the servant says in his supplication, ‘O Allaah! I shall keep to the covenant that You have made binding upon me with regard to Eemaan. I shall faithfully keep to it and comply with it as far as I am able.'

[14] Soorah al-Fatihah (1): 5

The saying of the Prophet ﷺ: “As for as I Allah's Messenger ﷺ able…” is a qualification for all of this, making it dependent upon ability and this is from the Mercy of Allaah to the Ummah. Some of the people of knowledge say that this saying of the Prophet ﷺ lays down the condition of ability and that it is an acknowledgement of one's weakness and deficiency whose meaning is, ‘I am not able to fully complete Eemaan nor to attain its highest level and most perfect form. I acknowledge my weakness and shortcoming. I am not able-so do not hold me to account for my weakness, deficiency and falling short.' Allaah, the Most High, has said in the Noble Qur'aan:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ

**“Allaah does place a burden on any soul greater than it can bear.”** [15]

And there occurs in a hadeeth that Allah, the Most High said: "**I have done (granted) it.**" [16] It is also reported from the Prophet, ﷺ in the authentic hadeeth that he said, "If I command you with something then do as much of it as you can, and whatever I forbid you then leave it (altogether)." [17] So here, the point is explained by the scholars that when he mentioned the command (al-Amr), he made it dependent upon ability, since there may be some commands that a person may not be able to carry out, or which he may not be able to carry out fully. So the performance of the command is made dependent upon ability. Thus, his saying, "... as far as I am able ..." contains a message for the Ummah that no one

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[15] Soorah al-Baqarah (2):286

[16] Reported by Muslim, Eng. Trans., vol. 1, no. 229.

[17] Reported by al-Bukhaaree, Eng. Trans. vol. 9, no. 391.

will be able to carry out every obligation that he has to Allaah, nor to completely fulfill the obedience and thanks that is due from him for the favors bestowed upon him. So Allaah had compassion upon the Ummah and did not require from them in that regard except what they were able to do: to strive and carry out acts of obedience to Allaah; to give thanks for His favors and to implement eemaan as far as one is able. Allaah knows each glare of the eye And that which the hearts conceal.

However, when the Prophet ﷺ mentioned the forbiddance he said, "... and what I have forbidden you from, then leave it (altogether)." He did not say "... as far as you are able," and, as the scholars say, forbiddance means that one has to refrain from doing something. This is within the ability of everybody.

Everyone is capable of refraining from fornication, theft, murder and all matters that Allaah has forbidden. No one may say, ‘I am unable to leave anything from these affairs.' No one will say that except a person who is corrupt and whose desire is to commit sins, and Allaah's refuge is sought. Therefore, leaving forbidden things was not made conditional upon ability.

Next, the saying of the Prophet “I acknowledge before You all the favors you have bestowed upon me, and I confess all my sins to You," is both an affirmation and a confession. "I acknowledge..." means, ‘I acknowledge and affirm,' and this wording appears in another narration of the hadeeth. It is an affirmation of Allaah's favors, ‘I affirm Your favors upon me.' If we examine and consider the hadeeth we find that the affirmation is not restricted to any specific favor. Rather, the Prophet ﷺ left it unrestricted. So, "I acknowledge Your favors upon me ..." means, ‘I acknowledge and affirm every favour with which You have blessed me.'

**"Whatever blessings you have are from Allaah."**[18]

In the supplication, the saying of the servant, 'I acknowledge Your favours upon me ...' is an acknowledgement of all of Allaah's favours: the blessing of eemaan; the blessing of health and children; the blessing of crops; the blessing of a house-every blessing is from Allaah. He, the Perfect and Most High, is the One who grants and bestows them.

Having acknowledged these blessings, it is necessary for the servant to give thanks for them to Allaah, the Perfect and Most High. As He, the Majestic and Most High has said:

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ
وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

**"And remember when Your Lord proclaimed, 'If you give thanks will give you increase in blessings, but if you deny the favours and are thankless, then I shall punish you severely."** [19]

So the servant must give thanks to Allaah for His favours with his heart, his tongue and his actions. He praises and gives thanks for the blessing and he expresses his thanks by obedience to Allaah.

With respect to the saying of the Prophet ﷺ "I admit my sin..." the people of knowledge mention two meanings. The first of these is, 'I admit my sin in not fully giving thanks for Your favors,' and since, 'I admit my sin ...' immediately follows the sentence, "I acknowledge

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[18] Soorah an-Nahl (16)3
[19] Soorah Ibraheem (14): 7

Your favors upon me ..." it means, 'My sin in falling short ...'-'I admit that I fall short in giving thanks for Your favors.'

The other explanation is that his saying, 'I confess my sin...' may mean, 'I confess all my sins,' unrestrictedly, that is, all my acts of disobedience and every sin that I have committed.

By this admission that he has sinned, the servant acknowledges that he has fallen short with regard to Allaah's rights upon him; that he has not performed Allaah's rights as he should. It is this acknowledgement that is the beginning of the road to repentance. However, if he commits acts of disobedience and falls into destructive sins, yet does not feel that he is a sinner, then repentance is something far away from him unless he is guided to its causes and granted the success of being put upon its path.

So there are two meanings of his saying, "I confess my sins ..." and perhaps the more correct of the two, and Allaah knows best, is the second. The servant's admission of having sinned and fallen short; having erred and been deficient should lead to his seeking forgiveness and this is the core meaning of the hadeeth.

Then, his saying, "I acknowledge Your favours upon me and I confess my sins ..." contains an indication of a matter that is mentioned by the people of knowledge. It is that the servant, in this life, continually passes back and forth throughout the day and the night between two affairs. These are either a blessing newly granted to him by Allaah, and all blessings are from Allaah, and this requires that he gives thanks. Alternatively, he falls into a sin and this requires him to repent and to seek forgiveness. Therefore some of the Salaf used to say, 'I enter the morning in between blessings and sins, so I want to put forth thanks for the blessings and to seek forgiveness for the sins.

A further point of great benefit to be taken from the hadeeth is that, whatever sin the servant has committed, if he acknowledges the fact that he has sinned and then truly repents-Allaah accepts his repentance, whatever the sin, and forgives him. This meaning is clearly stated in another hadeeth, the long hadeeth of the doubt (al-Ifk)', and the evidence here is the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, "**If the servant acknowledges his sin and repents, then Allaah accepts his repentance.**" [20]

Then his saying at the end of the hadeeth of Shaddaad ibn Aws ؓ, "None forgives sins except You," is an acknowledgement that Allaah alone is the One who forgives sins, and that He is the One who accepts repentance from His servants. Therefore the servant turns - in repentance, obedience, seeking forgiveness and pardon - to Allaah alone, since none forgives sins except Him.

Amongst the benefits to be obtained from the explanation and clarification of this hadeeth is that it makes apparent to us the fact that it contains two affairs: Tawheed and at-Istighfaar (seeking forgiveness). These two are the greatest and most important of affairs and they are similarly combined in many texts of the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ. From these texts is the saying of Allaah, the Most High:

فَٱعۡلَمۡ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرۡ لِذَنۢبِكَ
وَلِلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ وَٱلۡمُؤۡمِنَٰتِۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ مُتَقَلَّبَكُمۡ وَمَثۡوَىٰكُمۡ

**"Then know that none deserves nor has the right to be worshipped except Allaah, and ask for forgiveness for your sins**

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[20] Reported by Muslim, End;. Trans. vol. 4, no. 6673

**and also for believing men and believing women, for Allaah knows well your actions whilst awake and whilst in your places of sleep."**[21]

Likewise Allaah mentions what Dhun-Noon [22] said, calling out through the depths of the darkness:

أَن لَّآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنتَ سُبۡحَٰنَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ

**"None has the right to be worshipped but You, far removed are You from imperfection! I have been one of those who have wronged themselves!"** [23]

There is also the Saying of Allaah, the Most High:

فَٱسۡتَقِيمُوٓاْ إِلَيۡهِ وَٱسۡتَغۡفِرُوهُۗ

**"So make your worship purely for Allaah and seek His forgiveness for your sins.'** [24]

So, in these aayaat, the Tawheed of Allaah and the seeking of His forgiveness for sin are mentioned together and there are many texts like these that combine the two matters, as they are combined in this tremendous hadeeth - the hadeeth of the most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness.

So to summarize briefly, this tremendous hadeeth comprises:

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[21] Soorah Muhammad (47):19.

[22] i.e. Yoonus (Jonah) عليه السلام

[23] Soorah al-Anbiyaa (21):87.

[24] Soorah Fussilat (41):6.

(i) Acknowledgement of Allaah's Divinity and sole right to be worshipped

(ii) Acknowledgement that He is the Creator

(iii) Acknowledgement of the Covenant that Allaah has taken from His servants

(iv) The hope for that which He has promised them

(v) Seeking refuge from having transgressed against ones soul

(vi) Attribution of all blessings to the One who gave and granted them, and that is Allaah alone

(vii) Attribution of sins and commission of mistakes to ones own self

(viii) And it contains the servant's desire for forgiveness and his acknowledgement that none can forgive except Allaah, the One free of all imperfections.

In conclusion, O my brothers - may Allaah guide me and you to every good and grant us success in attaining it - we say of this mighty hadeeth, that comprises all these very great matters and all these excellent, comprehensive and beneficial meanings, that it fully deserves to bear the title, "The most excellent manner o f seeking forgiveness."

It is therefore befitting that we give it the importance and attention that it deserves - that we memorise its wording and make it one of

our adhkaar in the morning, after the Fajr prayer and in the evening, either before or after sunset.

I repeat its wording for the sake of memorisation of it, and with its repetition I complete this lecture and I ask Allaah that he may make it beneficial ...

The most excellent manner of seeking forgiveness is that the servant says:

اللَّهُـمَّ أَنْــتَ رَبِّــي لاَ إِلَــهَ إلاَّ أَنْــتَ
خَلَقْتَنِي وَأَنَا عَبْدُكَ ، وَأَنا عَلَى عَهْدِكَ
وَوَعْدِكَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ أَعُـوْذُ بِـكَ مِـنْ
شَرِّ مَا صَنَعْــتُ ، أَبُـوءُ لَـكَ بِنِعْمَتِـكَ
عَلَيَّ ، وَأَبُوءُ بِذَنْبِي ، فَاغْفِرْ لِـي فَإِنَّـهُ
لاَيَغْفِرُ الذُّنوبَ إِلاَّ أَنْتَ.

**"O Allaah, You are my Lord. None has the right to be wrshipped except You. You created me, and I am Your slave/worshipper. And I am faithful to my covenant and my promise as far as I am able. I seek Your refuge from the evil of what I have done. I acknowledge before You all the favours that You have bestowed upon me. And I confess all my sins to You. So forgive me, since none can forgive sins except You."**

I ask Allaah, the Noble and Generous, the Lord of the tremendous Throne, by His perfect Names and by His lofty and sublime

attributes, that He provides us with His aid in establishing this and every dhikr and every act of obedience to Him.

Allaah knows best, and may He extol and send blessings of peace and security, and bless the slave of Allaah and His Messenger-our Prophet Muhammmad. Our final call is that all praise is for Allaah, the Lord of all creation.